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Memories

(Episode 11)

Beginning of Affinity with Poetry and Literature

Hazrat Maulana Sehban Mahmood Sahab (May his secret be sanctified) had, along with teaching us our syllabus, ingrained the taste for poetry and literature in me. Hazrat himself would compose fine poetry. He would not only recite his favourite couplets during lessons, but would also explain their literary subtleties in such a profound manner that we would appreciate the deeper meanings of the couplets, and would enjoy them. At some point, he began the practice of giving us a hemistich (first line of a couplet) and would tell us to complete the couplet. Thus we would create a line of poetry, according to our capabilities, rhyming with the hemistich, and present it to him, and he would make appropriate corrections.

On the other hand, I have written previously that poetry and literature permeated the culture of our house. Our respected father (May his secret be sanctified) used to say couplets not only in Urdu, but also in Arabic and Persian. Our eldest brother, Hazrat Zaki Kaifi Sahab (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) was formally a poet, and due to him renowned poets used to often our house often. Our sisters also had a remarkable taste for poetry, and respected Muhammad Wali Razi Sahab would also sometimes write couplets. As a result, whenever all of us brothers and sisters would gather together in the house, we would sometimes start *Bayt Baazi*¹; sometimes one of us would recite an interesting poem or *Ghazal* we had read or heard somewhere, and all of us would enjoy it; sometimes we would read a literary article together; and sometimes *Chhoti Aapa* would read Hafeez Jalandhari's *Shahnama-e-Islam* to us, which we would listen with much eagerness and zeal. These were the activities of recreation and entertainment in our household.

In the backdrop of this household environment, I had developed a zeal for poetry and literature from my childhood. I was only nine years old when I had already memorized several poems and *Ghazals*. A children's magazine called "*Saathi*" ("Companion") used to be published in those days. My elder brother respected Muhammad Razi Sahab (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) had signed up for this magazine under my name, and I would be overjoyed at receiving it. I would eagerly wait for it each month, and would excitedly await the arrival of the postman at the beginning of each month for sake of the magazine. When I would finally get it, I would not be contented until I had read it cover to cover. It was from reading this magazine that the desire arose in my heart that I should also write something. My sister, whom we used to call *Chhoti Aapa*, would especially encourage me in this regard. The magazines

¹ *Bayt Baazi* is a poetry competition where each participant has to say a couplet starting with the last letter of the previous participant's couplet.

of those days used to have a page for pen friendship. Children would send their names and addresses to be published, and would invite other children to become friends with them through postal mail. When this magazine initiated the page for pen friendship, my sister suggested that I should write a letter to one of the names listed on the page, and that this would help me practice composition. Therefore I looked through the names listed for pen friendship. The name I liked the most was “Mujahid”. Looking at his address I came to know that he stayed in the African city of Nairobi which, at that time, was the capital of Tanganyika. (Later Tanganyika was renamed Kenya). I chose him for pen friendship just because I loved the word “Mujahid”. I wrote a letter by putting together some haphazard words and showed it to *Chhoti Aapa*. She made corrections to it and converted it into a proper letter. I put it in the post, and also received a reply. This pen friendship continued for some days; I would initiate a letter to this unseen friend and would show it to *Chhoti Aapa*, who would review it and garnish it with literary flavour. In this manner, over time, I also began gaining some aptness for writing.

In those same days, in the Readers’ Opinion section of the daily “*Jang*” newspaper, people would write letters which would spark some topic of debate, and letters from both sides would be published. One time the pointless debate started as to whether a woman can be a poet or not. *Chhoti Aapa* told me to send my point of view to the newspaper. In compliance to her order I wrote a letter to “*Jang*” which was published under the title “Womankind and Poetry”. This was my first piece of writing which was published. At a later time, the debate started as to whether *Quaid-e-Azam*’s face should be printed on currency notes or not. I wrote a letter titled “Pictures on Currency Notes” in which I took the stand that pictures (of animate objects) are impermissible, and that this practice lays the ground for the establishment of personality cults, and therefore no pictures (of animate objects) should be printed on our currency notes. Moreover, one time the debate started as to whether coeducation should be allowed in the country or not. At this, I sent a letter presenting arguments against coeducation. All these letters were published in “*Jang*”, and not only was the moral support of *Chhoti Aapa* involved in writing them, she also reviewed and amended them. Therefore, it would probably not be incorrect for me to say that it was her teaching, nurturing and encouragement that were the foundation for my literary efforts. I was ten years old at the time. She got married to late respected Shafqat Ali Sahab, who resided in Lahore, on 27 February 1953. Coincidentally, *Tahreer-e-Khatm-e-Nubuwwat* (Movement for the Finality of Prophethood) was at its peak in the entire country on the day of her wedding. A grand gathering was being held in *Aram Bagh*, to which Hazrat Maulana Ataullah Shah Bukhari (May Allah Ta’ala’s mercy be upon him) was addressing, and arrest warrants for several senior scholars of the country had been issued. Rumours about the arrest warrant for our respected father (May Allah Ta’ala’s mercy be upon him) were also heard, and we were unsure whether he could attend his daughter’s wedding. But in the end Allah Ta’ala protected him, and the wedding took place in peace and joy.

I still remember that when *Chhoti Aapa* left our house, I cried for weeks remembering her. She used to visit Karachi once a year, and those days would be like *Eid* for me. A long time after her wedding I expressed my emotions in the form of a poem, in which I said:

چھوٹی آپا! مری اس نظم کا عنوان تم ہو

تم ہو اس بزم کی تزیین کا سامان تم ہو

حضرتِ والدِ ماجد کی نگاہوں کا سرور
والدہ کے رُخِ پُر نور کی افشاں تم ہو
تم سے بہنوں کے دلوں میں ہے طربِ نغمہ سرا
بھائیوں کے لئے ہر درد کا درماں تم ہو
مہر و الفت کے جہاں پھول مہکتے ہیں سدا
ہاں وہ گلشن، وہ گلستاں، وہ خیاباں تم ہو
جس جگہ شور ہے انسانوں کی افزونی کا
اُس جگہ میں بھی جو ملتا نہیں انساں، تم ہو
بے رخی اور لگاؤ کے ان اندھیاروں میں
روشنی جس سے ہے، وہ شمعِ فروزاں تم ہو
تم سے ہے میری بظر میں رُخِ ہستی پہ نکھار
جس سے ہے بزمِ محبت میں چراغاں، تم ہو
تم سے چونک اُٹھتی ہیں ارمانوں کی نورس کلیاں
عید کا چاند ہو تم، صبحِ بہاراں تم ہو!
لوریوں میں بھی مجھے درس دے ہیں تم نے
ہاں میری بہن، میری دوست، میری ماں تم ہو!

Translation:

Chhoti Aapa! You are the title of this poem of mine, you
You are the adornment of this gathering, you
The coolness of respected father's eyes,
You are the glitter of the illuminated cheeks of mother, you
Cheerfulness sings in our sisters' hearts due to you,
You are the cure for every pain of our brothers, you
Where flowers of love and kindness blossom all the time,

You are that garden, that flowerbed, you are that park, you
Amidst assertions that there is an abundance of people,
The one person missing is you,
Amidst glooms of apathy and (superficial) attachment,
You are the brilliant flame with which there is light,
The world, in my eyes, looks beautiful due to you,
This gathering of love lights up with you,
Petals of hope blossom to life with you,
You are the crescent of Eid, a (beautiful) spring morning, you!
You have taught me lessons even in lullabies
You are my sister, my friend, you are my mother, you

When I recited this poem to her when she visited Karachi, she wrote a reply with the same rhyme and rhythm after returning to Lahore:

چھوٹے بھائی! میری اس نظم کا عنوان تم ہو
آنکھ کا نور ہو، تسکین دل و جاں تم ہو
تم سے میکے کی فضائوں میں ہے اک کیفِ نشاط
کیا چمن زار ہے وہ جس کی بہاراں تم ہو!
آنکھ کا نور ہو، والد کے جگر کی راحت،
والدہ کے لئے تسکین کا ساماں تم ہو!
بھائی کے خونِ شجاعت میں حرارت تم سے
اور بہنوں کا مچلتا ہوا ارماں تم ہو
سب سے چھوٹے ہو، تمہیں پیار ہے سب کا حاصل
ہے دلوں پر بھی حکومت، وہ سلیمان تم ہو
دیکھ کر تم کو میرے دور ہوں سب رنج و محن
بھول جائوں جسے پا کر غمِ دوراں تم ہو!

ہیں مرے گلشنِ بستی میں بہاریں تم سے
کشتِ دل جس سے ہے سیراب وہ باراں تم ہو
تم سے کھلتے ہیں یہ ارمانوں کے نورس غنچے
جس میں یہ پھول مہکتے ہیں، وہ داماں تم ہو
دل ہے یا علم کے انوار کا آئینہ ہے!
درس دیتا ہو جو پیہم، وہ دبستان تم ہو
جہل و الحاد کے بڑھتے ہوئے اندھیاروں میں
روشنی جس سے ہے، وہ شمعِ فروزاں تم ہو
الغرض حمد اُسی ذات کی زیبا ہے مجھے
جس کا انعام ہو تم، رحمتِ یزداں تم ہو

Translation:

Little brother! You are the title of this poem of mine, you
The coolness of eyes, you are the peace of my heart, you
An invigorating aura pervades parents' home with you,
How wonderful must that flowerbed be, whose spring is you!
You are the light of eyes, the comfort of father's heart,
You are the source of serenity for mother, you
The brave blood of brothers stirs up with you,
And you are the ardent hope of sisters, you
You are the youngest, enjoying the love of all,
You are the Solomon who reigns even over hearts, you,
Your sight removes all my griefs and hardships,
Having you makes me forget all worries of life, you
My garden of life gets its spring from you,
You are the rain which waters the garden of my heart, you

Petals of hope blossom to life with you,
You are the valley in which flowers exude their fragrance, you
Your heart is a mirror of the enlightenment of knowledge,
You are the school that teaches ceaselessly, you
Amidst shrouding glooms of ignorance and disbelief,
You are the brilliant flame with which there is light, you
In short, praise of that Being befits me,
Whose gift you are, a mercy of God, you

Our new academic year was beginning from Shawwal 1374H, when I reached twelve years of age. In that year as well (i.e. 1374H to 1375H) *Sharh Jami*, *Maqamat Hariri*, *Kanz ul-Daqaq*, *Usool ush-Shaashi*, *Qutbi*, *Sharh Tahzeeb* and *Albalaaghah Al-Waadihah*, all our books were assigned to Hazrat Maulana Sehban Mahmood Sahab (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him), and we continued benefitting from his unforgettable style of teaching. I have mentioned previously about Hazrat (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) that in those days he was especially fond of poetry and literature, and he himself used to compose fine couplets. As a result of his taste for literature, he used to imbue colour even in books such as *Sharh Jami*. That year, when we studied *Albalaaghah Al-Waadihah* under him, this taste of his made the joy of studying this book two-fold. *Albalaaghah Al-Waadihah* is itself replete with exquisite literary jewels. Hazrat would explain the subtleties of eloquence and rhetoric with examples from Urdu poetry, as a result of which the entire lesson would become thoroughly vibrant and colourful. For example, I remember that while explaining "*Ta'qeed Ma'navi*" he recited this couplet of *Momin* as an example:

خیال خواب راحت ہے علاج اس بدگمانی کا
وہ ظالم قبر میں مومن مرا شانہ بلاتا ہے

Translation:

The thought of dream is a relief, the cure for this mistrust
O Momin, the merciless one taps my shoulder even in the grave

Hazrat explained that "علاج اس بدگمانی کا؟" (cure for this mistrust?) is actually a question, and its meaning will not be understood unless a question mark is put at its end, or it's read in a questioning tone. In short, in similar ways, we benefitted greatly from his literary disposition.

After returning home in the evening, we would play in Burns Garden or Polo Ground until *Maghrib*, and thereafter remain busy in preparing for our lessons, and perusal. Thereafter, all of us siblings would

gather and often compete in *Bayt Baazi*, and due to my enthusiasm for this competition, I had developed the zeal to memorize as many couplets as I could. In those same days, when we got *Shahnama-e-Islam* of Hafeez Jalandhary in our house, we would sit around *Chhoti Aapa* who would read it to us in a fluent and rhythmic tone, and her voice still echoes in my ears. I loved the *Shahnama* so much that I had memorized entire pages from it, and the reality is that I had learnt the detailed events of Battle of Badr, Battle of Uhud and Battle of Trench through *Shahnama* first, and only later in the books of my syllabus.

Sometimes someone would bring some good religious or literary book, and we would all enjoy reading it together. At some time "*An-Nabiyyul Khatam*" (Peace be upon him) of Maulana Manazir Ahsan Gilani (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) was being read; at some other time "*Ghubar-e-Khatir*" of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was read; at some time Hazrat Maulana Asghar Husain Sahab's (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) "*Khwab-e-Sheereen*", and at some other time the humorous articles of late Patras Bukhari were being read. In short, this gathering of brothers and sisters used to be very lively and colourful. And if ever our respected father (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) would get some time to join us, then we would not need any other pastime. Any time we would get with him would be blissfully delightful. Our respected father (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) would blend in with us, and would sometimes narrate stories of his elders, sometimes events from Islamic history, and sometimes about those of his daily engagements which we could comprehend.

In those days some beneficial programs used to be aired even on Radio Pakistan. In the morning, it would begin with a recitation of the Quran by the late Qari Zahir Qasmi Sahab, after which the daily episode of Hazrat Maulana Ihtishamul Haq Thanvi's (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) *Dars-e-Quran* (Lessons of the Quran) would be broadcast. On Fridays, at the request of the then-Director of Radio Pakistan, late Zulfiqar Ali Bukhari, our respected father's (May Allah Ta'ala's mercy be upon him) lectures of *Ma'ariful Quran* would be aired. The programs after these would also feature less shamelessness than appear in today's radio and television programs. The programs in those days would be highly literary in nature, and several interesting and informative series would also be broadcast. We learned about the game of "*Cheestaan*", which was a competition of general knowledge, from the radio. A weekly poetic gathering also used to air, in which one hemistich (first line of a couplet) would be given and the participants had to create the second line of the couplet, and several notable poets from around the country used to take part. Hafeez Jalandhary, Adeeb Saharanpuri, Himayat Ali Shair, Shair Lakhnawi, Mahirul Qadri, Rais Amrohvi, Qamar Jalalvi, Iram Lakhnawi, they would all recite their latest poems almost every week in this gathering, and all of us brothers and sisters would eagerly listen to it. If ever poets from India were visiting Pakistan they would also be invited. Thus, we listened to respected Jigar Muradabadi, Shakeel Badayuni, and Jagan Nath Azad for the first time in that poetic gathering.

Now it comes to mind that in those days even our pastimes were of an educational and literary nature, which helped increase one's knowledge and also enhanced one's scholarly and literary taste. It was due to these gatherings that I developed a love for books.